

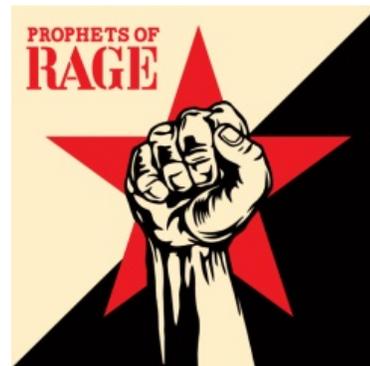
# Prophets of Rage: Prophets of Rage

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*Prophets of Rage* is a protest record meant to boil the blood, but instead it passes by in a haze of vague nothingness. Ironically, that's also what saves the album from total wretchedness. Technically speaking, there's nothing here that's really bullshit—no Rothschilds or chemtrails, nothing as egregious as the transphobic abuse Public Enemy pointlessly hurled at Caitlyn Jenner on their last album. The statements here are true enough. However, there's nothing here that merits much thought on the audience's part; Prophets of Rage want to be viscerally agreed with.



The Prophets are an all-star cast of firebrands who've been more energized in the past: Chuck D and DJ Lord from Public Enemy, the non-singing members of Rage Against the Machine and, for some reason, B-Real from Cypress Hill. Ostensibly the impetus to get this band together was to protest the Trump regime, but the band's statements are so broad they could apply to any administration. Switch the pronouns and "Hail to the Chief" could be about Clinton. It's shocking that, amid one of the darkest chapters of American history, these musicians have nothing to say.

"Legalize Me" is an anthem that ignores any and all of the fundamental issues behind pot legalization: patients who depend on it for their well-being, for instance, or the fact that black boys still rot in jail for minor drug offenses as white entrepreneurs rake in weed cash in Boulder. It seems mostly there to emphasize that there's a guy from Cypress Hill in the band, and to be fair, he needs all the help he can get. While Chuck's voice is still hearty and strong, B-Real raps through a filter that's meant to sound like a megaphone but ends up sounding like Timbaland.

This is the kind of music people think of when they say they don't like protest music. It seems to sell itself through the *aesthetic* of protest music, down to the Shepard Fairey cover and the nonsensical name of the band itself. "Hypocrisy" is rhymed with "democracy," though thankfully there are no "-ation" rhyme schemes. Much of this record is essentially gibberish. No advice is given for how to actually fight these issues beyond "rise." And the music isn't much help: textureless rap-rock that leaves you pining for the sledgehammer embrace of the Bomb Squad.

But what makes *Prophets of Rage* ultimately fail as protest music is its flat-out refusal to say anything anyone listening to this record is likely to disagree with. The people actually making a difference in America—protesters, political activists—are likely to see through the Prophets' paper-thin facade. It's a simple fact that many people listening to this record will be closet racists, sexists, and queerphobes who comfort themselves with liberal guilt, who assume they're off the hook because they voted for a black president. Prophets of Rage refuse to call their bluff.

A lyric like "*no hatred, fuck racists*" is useless, because nobody listening to this thing is likely to think of themselves as a racist; more likely they'll conjure up some vague image of a redneck in their head. *Prophets of Rage* provides slogans to hurl outward, promoting an us-versus-them view of the world where the good guys are the listener and the bad guys are... well, it can be as broad as the prejudices that penetrate the deepest levels of American society or as specific as some guys with armbands. "Fuck racism" is a little better but still barely scrapes the surface.

Good protest music calls the audience's bluff. It makes you wonder if you're part of the machine it rages against. It trusts the listener to change, and at its best it can make that change in you. Not long before I listened to *Prophets of Rage* for the first time, I was able to get my hands on a copy of DJ Sprinkles' *Midtown 120 Blues*, an album I heard for the first time in college but which I went a long time without hearing due to its rarity; it's given me more to think about over the last few years than just about all the other political and protest albums I've heard combined.

*Midtown 120 Blues* is essentially a treatise by a veteran New York house DJ on how her genre has been stripped of its origins in queer communities of color to serve capitalist interests. Her strategy is to make beautiful house beats, then rant over them so you literally cannot listen to them without context. You can hear the venom in her voice as she laments the commodification of queer culture and pulls no punches as she sinks her teeth into Madonna for making millions off “Vogue” while “the queen who taught her how to vogue was sitting in front of me, broke.”

It makes you think: *am I complicit in this decontextualization? Am I part of the problem? How can I change?* With *Prophets of Rage*, you’re more likely think: *gee, those racists really suck*. Then your stomach rumbles and you flip through your Thug Kitchen cookbook.

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